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ABSTRACT

A study examined the current legitimacy crisis that faces America's educational system and the efforts of one group, Catholic schools, in addressing this crisis. A legitimation model for educational institutions was developed based on the values society calls for in education, and this model was then applied to Catholic schools to see how their current efforts to legitimate themselves match what society deems important. To assess the data collected, various types of public relations materials (annual reports, recruiting materials, newsletters, etc.) from randomly selected Catholic schools (mostly in Illinois, including the Archdiocese of Chicago) were evaluated. Application of the model indicates that Catholic schools effectively address the dimensions of performance, retention, order, and moral standards in their public relations materials. However, the audience that these materials reach, and therefore the audience that the schools seek legitimacy with, is very narrow in scope. If there is an interest by the Catholic Church in a broader audience, a more in-depth and encompassing public relations campaign needs to be undertaken. Findings also support the idea that any organization which attempts to legitimate itself (as the Catholic Church has done in education) must seek relevant information from its publics concerning the values important to persons within that society. These values are the key link to an effective public relations campaign, establishing common ground between the organization and its publics. (Contains 66 references.) (NKA)

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Crisis in our Schools:
The Legitimacy of Catholic Schools and the Educational System

by

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Crisis in our Schools:

The Legitimacy of Catholic Schools and the Educational System

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the current legitimacy crisis that faces America's educational system, and the efforts of one group, Catholic schools, in addressing this crisis. A legitimation model for educational institutions is developed based on the values society calls for in education, and this model is then applied to Catholic schools to see how their current efforts to legitimate themselves match what society deems important. Varying types of public relations materials from randomly selected Catholic schools are evaluated to asses this data. Several key issues of legitimacy are addressed in this study and the conclusion provides insight into the practical applications of the proposed model.

Crisis in our Schools:

The Legitimacy of Catholic Schools and the Educational System

"Perhaps no crisis more directly affects the direction and future of our society than the crisis in public education," says educator Keith Ferrell (1992). Hundreds of quotations regarding the status of education such as this one can be seen in articles in major newspapers and magazines that span the last decade. These articles address the concerns of society as its attitudes change and its confidence in the education that public school's provide declines (Boyd, 1983; Toch, 1991). Cries for reform come from the masses as schools fail to meet the societal expectations.

Schools in American society serve an important function. They educate our children; and with the widely reported failures in this capacity, they currently face a legitimation crisis. The concept of legitimacy is a rich area of inquiry that has been applied in various disciplines such as political science, sociology, and communication. Legitimacy is based on the perceived congruence between the values of an organization or institution and those of the environment or public in which it operates. Most research on this issue looks at the legitimacy of corporations and government institutions, but any organization that serves society must also answer to it (Gibson,1991) and therefore seek to be perceived as legitimate.

The legitimacy of the education system is something that has been taken for granted since its establishment in the late eighteenth century (Walberg & Hess, 1985; Toch, 1991). Public confidence always has seemed high when it came to the "common"

schooling tradition of America; however, a wave of reports about the conditions of our nation's schools that concern drugs, violence, ineffective education, and difficulty in the administration, has caused a sharp turn in the confidence and belief in our nations' education system (Toch, 1991).

As this crisis begins to take shape, however, some schools have taken advantage of this situation and attempt to legitimate themselves. To do this, they address the key values that society calls for in education. Catholic educators, for example, go through great efforts in order to capitalize on the legitimation crisis that public education faces. The purpose of this study then, is to address the concerns of society about the decline of legitimacy in public education and to examine the legitimation attempts of Catholic schools. I propose to first explain the issue of legitimacy and form a legitimation model that applies to education. Second, I explore the facets of this model and apply them to the problems in the schools; in doing so, I show that many schools suffer a legitimacy crisis. Finally, I apply the legitimation model to the Catholic school system and attempt to show how these schools attempt to create an effective congruence between their values and the values that the public advocates. I contend that the Catholic schools have addressed the needs and concerns of society and are attempting to create the perception of themselves as legitimate educational institutions.

Legitimacy and Education

Legitimacy for an organization is determined by the congruence

of an organization's values and those of the public that it serves (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Hearit, 1993). Legitimacy is considered to be present as long as an organization maintains this congruence of values (Perrow, 1970). Legitimacy is a concept that can be measured on a continuum. This continuum puts forth the idea that there are varying degrees of legitimacy, with illegitimacy existing on an entirely different level (Epstein & Dow Votaw, 1978). Economic organizations find that they must exert a considerable amount of resources to keep themselves on the positive side of the legitimacy continuum. However, for-profit organizations are not the only institutions that must seek the status of legitimacy with their publics (Maurer, 1971). Non-for-profit organizations also serve societal needs and therefore need to seek legitimacy.

Perrow states that in society, the output of one organization will be utilized by another aspect or organization within that society. Therefore, the output of the organization is needed in the society and, in order to attract members of society, the organization must legitimate itself with its publics (1970). This legitimacy can be attained by identification with the values that are important to society and keeping track of such values as they change and new ones develop (Stillman, 1974).

The educational system, and more specifically, each school itself, must also seek legitimacy. The output that they "produce," educated students, is a very important aspect of society. Without well-educated students and effective environments for this education to take place, society faces decline and possible

disintegration. The primary function of America's schools is to serve the needs of society (Gibson,1986) Contemporary society needs well educated students and needs schools that can fulfill this capacity. Any organization that serves in this capacity of necessity must justify itself to its publics.

The principle factors that determine legitimacy vary depending on an organization's size, mission, and the output it produces. The educational system currently faces a legitimation crisis. Over half of all individuals polled in a study by Louis Harris & Associates Inc. believe that the quality of schools today is only fair and in some cases quite poor (Vamos, 1992). This evaluation is based on reactions to the major problems that the schools face, and these reactions reveal what values are most important to the key publics of this system. Often, what determines legitimacy for organizations is not clear until those ideals are missed.

The legitimation model I propose revolves around the problems that schools currently face, and groups them under two key terms: competence and civic responsibility. These terms encompass the values that society calls for in education; however, the degree to which these need to be addressed often differs. While one person may believe that a school addresses a certain value and provides an atmosphere where the importance of this value is evident, another may feel that the school has not done enough. This is true also for the values themselves. What may lead one person to send their child to a specific school, may turn another away. The values that this legitimation model addresses have proven to be the most important, but that does not mean that every individual thinks that

all of them are crucial. This model draws from Hearit's model of corporate social legitimacy (1993), but adapts it to the educational system.

Competence

The issue of competence for a corporation is based on the ability of that organization to "deliver the goods" (Hearit, 1993). In educational systems, competence revolves around the school's effectiveness in the education of its student population. If the school cannot produce quality graduates then it will lose legitimacy with the publics it serves: parents, colleges to which graduates attend, and even businesses that need quality employees to run their organizations in the future. This idea of competence also involves the issues of effectiveness and appropriateness. In order to be competent, an organization must not only "produce" and "deliver" its goods, but it must do it in an effective and ethical (appropriate) manner (Epstein & Votaw, 1978; Kreps, 1990). Educational institutions must effectively educate students, but they must do so while following ehtical guidelines that promote appropriate methods and practices.

Performance.

The issue of competence is built upon the dimensions of: 1) performance - quality of faculty; and 2) retention - ability to keep students in school. Many schools lose legitimacy because they are viewed as incompetent in both of these aspects. The first of these aspects, performance, revolves around the quality of the

teachers at the schools as well as the school's ability to keep these teachers as a part of their organization. In a recent survey, for example, the most important factor in education as seen by the public is the quality of the teaching staff (Elam, et al., 1991). However, as many articles point out, teachers in today's schools do not enjoy their work, and as a result, schools experience a high-turnover rate. Of all the problems that schools face today, parents in the Chicago educational districts, for example, claim that one of the greatest is the poor quality of the teachers and the negative attitudes that the teachers have towards their jobs and education as a whole (Walberg & Hess, 1985). Citizens of South Dakota also point out this problem and state that teachers who are unsatisfied with their work frequently "skip" work. South Dakota has also experienced difficulty in the acquisition of good teachers as have many schools across the nation (Webster & Wood, 1985). The high number of teachers who leave the field also adds to the legitimacy problem through the result of their school's overcrowded classrooms (Gibson, 1985). Fewer teachers also means that the teacher student-ratio will increase as well. This results in a lack of attention to students and little understanding of the students themselves (Elam, et al, 1991). This issue of performance also affects the quality of the education that the students receive. Seventy-five percent of Americans feel that many schools do not prepare their students for today's complex job market (Szabo, 1990).

Retention.

The main function of schools is to educate society's young so students can follow in the footsteps of their parents and help to be the leaders of tomorrow. However, the schools cannot educate effectively when they have trouble with student retention and preparation. This issue, as well as performance, has caused much of society's lack of confidence in our education system. Over the last twenty years, the high school dropout rate has increased steadily while student attendance rates have decreased. In Chicago alone, the male dropout rate in 1988 reached forty-five percent, the female rate followed closely at thirty-five percent (Gibson, 1991). The issue of retention is among the top twenty problems that the national public sees in the educational system (Elam, et al, 1991).

Civic Responsibility

The second aspect of the legitimation model for educational organizations is termed "civic responsibility". This dimension calls attention to the relationship between an organization and the environment in which it exists (Hearit, 1993). The idea of "civic responsibility" stems from the belief that any organization that serves its society must be held accountable for all its actions and the ways in which it serves its basic functions (Schlusberg, 1969; Epstein, 1972; Hearit, 1993). The idea of accountability affects the educational system as well. Governmental officials bear this out; former President Bush stated that all schools, be they public or private, serve the public and are held accountable by the public authority (Toch, 1991). An organization that seriously affects the

needs and future of hundreds of young people is likely to be held to a high level of accountability (Hill & Chubb, 1991). This dimension of "civic responsibility" consists of two basic elements: order and moral standards; both relate to the values emphasized by this accountability.

Order.

The element of "order" revolves around the idea that the educational system must provide schools that are safe and effective places for education to occur. This builds upon the issue of organizational responsibility. Organizations that serve society are accountable to those that they serve and therefore need to exhibit some degree of social responsibility (Schlusberg, 1969; Epstein & Votaw, 1978; Hearit, 1993). To be considered socially responsible is one of the greatest indicators of organizational legitimacy (Epstein, 1972).

The idea of a safe and orderly environment is the most important indicator of an effective school (Jandes, 1986). Seventy-six percent of people around the nation surveyed on the issue of education stated that the maintenance of student discipline is the second leading factor in school choice, subsequently they believe that the issue of discipline is one of the biggest problems in the educational system today (Elam, et al, 1991). School programs face competition with many outside influences (Walberg & Hess, 1985). The existence of gangs and other such peer groups have led to increased instances of crime,

vandalism, drugs, and the increased numbers of various weapons on school property. Students feel that they need to bring weapons to school for several reasons such as status and protection (Butterfield & Turner, 1989). In the Chicago schools, the issue of gangs and the disruptions they cause, along with the low emphasis on discipline, are two of the largest problems in the educational system (Gibson, 1991). This lack of discipline has even led some parents to teach their children at home, rather then risk their safety and send them to the schools (Pike, 1992).

Moral standards.

The second aspect of the "civic responsibility" dimension is the idea of "moral standards". This issue also calls attention to the relationship between the schools and society and to the responsibility that legitimate organizations need to portray. Educators must not only provide a safe environment that is conducive to learning, they also must instill certain values in their students that address such issues as crime, sexual activity, and the basics of right and wrong. Many believe that schools need to help children make choices that often are too difficult for them to make on their own (Pike, 1992). A primary objective of a school, then, should be to help students develop self-discipline and learn the importance of respect in today's society (Kusky, 1990).

The dimension of moral standards also is an issue that affects the legitimacy of the educational system. The lack of emphasis on moral standards is seen to be a major concern of society about the

education system (Elam, et al, 1991). Parents must instill certain values and morals in their children, but these values must be strengthened or reinforced within the classroom. Children spend almost half of their days outside of the family circle; parent's influence can not reach them here. Schools today, however, seem to de-emphasize moral standards and, as a result, many of today's students are perceived to lack positive direction (Conway, 1992).

When applied to the legitimation model for educational institutions, the problems that have been cited support the idea that schools today face a severe crisis of legitimation. In the midst of this crisis however, one aspect of the educational system, Catholic Schools, seek to present themselves as a legitimate alternative. Members of the education system have become "experts" in their explanations of the system's bad results, but Catholic schools extol their many accomplishments (Sowell, 1991). With all the problems that public schools must face in today's bureaucratic society, parochial schools serve as a model for troubled public institutions (Allis, 1991). Hence, through the engagement of active public relations campaigns, Catholic schools have many opportunities to communicate with multiple publics and, in the process, provide a clear and positive image (Donaldson, 1991). The Catholic schools have taken the problems in education as cited throughout society and used them as a legitimation resource against public education (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Hearit, 1993). Through this process, Catholic schools attempt to portray an image of themselves as legitimate institutions and use these perceptions in direct competition with

the public schools and districts.

As a steady stream of articles continues to address the crisis in public education, others view the positive attributes that the Catholic schools present to the public. Catholic schools and similar institutions, such as privately-owned schools and military academies, must look at all facets of their environments and project an image that is based on the values that are important to society (Gibson, 1986). Although each school must seek to create a name for itself, the legitimacy of one school influences other similar schools (1986). In order for this to occur, an office of development and public relations has become standard in most Catholic schools; it calls attention to the need for effective public relations in the midst of this crisis. The public relations a school engages in will help to establish a positive image with the public and for Catholic schools this is a key goal. Most of the public relations efforts for Catholic schools are created by the individual schools themselves, however over the last year, the Roman Catholic Church has taken up the task as well. The most recent campaign, "Discover Catholic Schools, 1992", attempted to promote the church's 7,291 elementary schools and 1,296 high schools through the use of posters, handbooks, and other promotional materials that each school could buy in order to aid in its recruitment efforts. (Allis, 1991).

However, as with any organization or institution that attempts to put itself into a favorable light, Catholic schools face issues that would impede their efforts. One such issue is the problem of sexual abuse by Catholic priests. Over the last several years,

increased instances of sexual misbehavior by priests throughout the United Sates and abroad have caused many Catholics to question the effectiveness of celibacy, as well as the safety of their children around priests (Allen, 1990; Loftus, 1990; Ostling, 1991; "Priests & Sex", 1992; Greeley, 1993). The numbers of priests and victims included in this scandal are not known (Greeley, 1993). However, the fact remains that the church must address this problem and further, the schools must attempt to disassociate themselves from the church and the problems that it faces in order to address its own problems. Even though the problem seems to exist outside of the traditional classroom, it does not stop the fact that people will view the problem as related to the Catholic school system as well.

There are many types of public relations activities that a school should engage in to build a better school and a solid reputation. These include the dissemination of newsletters, recruitment materials, annual reports, and various types of announcements. In order to build its image, a school should address the following characteristics: the primary services of the school, its unique characteristics, and the mission it builds its service upon. Other information can be portrayed through the use of catchy phrases, slogans, mottos, or pictures (Donaldson, 1991).

Evaluation

Catholic schools have taken advantage of public relations and have used many of the above suggestions in this task. To determine the effectiveness of this campaign, especially during the current

crisis in the public education system, it is important to evaluate the various public relations techniques of the Catholic schools and how these impact the establishment of their schools as legitimate institutions. For this purpose, four categories of publications from several Catholic schools are reviewed, and each dimension of the legitimation model is applied to them. Although some schools from different states are included, most schools and reports are representative of the state of Illinois and the Archdiocese of Chicago. The four categories of publications are as follows: annual reports, recruiting materials, newsletters, and a miscellaneous category that includes announcements and advertisements. The same publications are used for each aspect of the model. These reports are all built around the idea of reaching "excellence" in education and provide information to support this claim.

Competence

Performance.

As noted earlier, both performance and retention are critical in the establishment of a legitimate educational system. The performance of Catholic schools in annual reports serves, not only to provide the financial statistics of the schools, but to promote their positive attributes as well. Catholic schools seek to demonstrate pride in the achievement of their faculty as well as their dedication. One such attribute that is common to all of the reports reviewed is the quality of the teaching staff. In the opening of its annual report, Marian High School states that "with

the assistance of outstanding, competent administrators, and resourceful advisors" the school is able to help students "express their uniqueness" through support and understanding (1992). Mother McAuley also stresses the achievements of its staff in both leadership and instruction. The report cites that the school has received awards for "instructional leadership, teaching environment, curriculum and instruction, and organizational vitality"; it expresses the importance of a committed and dedicated staff which it claims is the force behind its success (1992). Notre Dame Academy, in its report, claims that its faculty is committed to "excellence in education" and that they share this commitment with the community as well (1992). St. Mary's Academy follows suit by stating its belief that its faculty "will not only meet, but exceed the challenges that lie before us" in the continuation of "excellence in education" (1992). St. Mary's also stresses the commitment the teachers have towards private education (1992). Marian Catholic uses images of achievement and dedication as well as an emphasis on the attention and support that their faculty gives to the student body. Marian Catholic states in its report that their reputation builds upon the commitment of their faculty "to the importance of education" and "their demand for the highest standards of excellence" (1991). The report also cites that the faculty "have been receiving increasing recognition and awards for their outstanding talents", as well as for the "contributions they are making to the development of the students in the areas of academics and value formation" (1991).

Recruitment materials, which serve as the force behind the

Catholic schools public relations campaign, are the most developed and informative links to the public. These publications raise the issue of a quality and dedicated faculty. Marian Catholic High School states that its faculty members are recognized in their respective fields; furthermore, it reports that fifty percent of its faculty holds advanced degrees and seventy-five percent have more than five years of teaching experience (1992). Marist High School (Chicago, IL) sums up the characteristics of its faculty with the phrase "dedicated to the goal of educating in the Catholic tradition (1989). Mother McAuley also sums up the attributes of its faculty in a phrase "highly-qualified teachers" that is included in its mission statement and backs this up with various examples of leadership and compassion throughout its brochure (1992). Northridge Prep (Des Plaines, IL), reports that interaction between faculty and students is one advantage of its school; it states that this creates "an atmosphere of mutual trust and teamwork" (1990). The brochure also calls attention to the number of advanced degrees held by the staff at Northridge and the dedication they have for Catholic education. This dedication is supported through the phrase "faculty members share a genuine Christian vision of what young boys can and should become, an awareness of their responsibility as role models, and a love for dedication to young people and their futures" (1990). Seton Academy (South Holland, IL), Providence (New Lenox, IL), and Gross High (Omaha, NE) all pride themselves in the advanced degrees that their teachers hold and the helpful and understanding atmosphere that they create as seen in their brochures (1992; 1989; 1985).

Newsletter information also supports the idea of quality teachers at Catholic schools. The data provided here is less frequent but still is important to consider. Most of the articles talk of awards given to faculty or the signing of new faculty. In the "Bruin Prints" (Padua Franciscan - Parma, OH), one of the faculty was awarded an endowment to help further his education (1992). "Marian Matters" (Marian Catholic H. S.), on the other hand announces the arrival of a new faculty member with an emphasis on the teacher's strong background and years of service to Catholic education (1993). Another issue of "Marian Matters" also seeks to build up the reputation of its faculty with the announcement that two of its mathematics teachers were recently recognized as outstanding high school teachers by the National Council of Teachers for School Mathematics (1992). The Archdiocese of Chicago, in its monthly newsletter, cites a recent Gallup Poll on attitudes towards education; forty-four percent of all surveyed believed that the quality of Catholic school faculty was superior to that of public education (1992).

Miscellaneous publications contain little information relevant to the performance dimension. The only publication that addresses quality of staff is the advertisement supplement, "Choose Catholic Schools". One part of the supplement deals with the "Heart of the School Awards" which recognizes the outstanding efforts of teachers throughout the Archdiocese of Chicago. Another deals with a teacher who has a unique "touch" in helping students to learn. The supplement concludes with a "report card" that assesses the Catholic schools, and cites that over seventy-five percent of the

Catholic high school teachers have advanced degrees (199?). This figure is quite impressive, but similar statistics for public schools are comparable. For example, public schools chosen at random from various Chicago suburbs and two from other states cite the following percentages of teachers holding advanced degrees: Warren Township High School: Gurnee, Illinois - 59.5% (Schelton, 1993); Thornton Fractional North & Thornton Fractional South: District 215-Lansing, Illinois - 68.2% (Zelanik, 1993); Bloom Township High School and Bloom High School: District 206-Chicago Heights, Illinois - 70% (Felicetti, 1993); Homewood Flossmoor High School: Homewood, Illinois - 84.5% (Sullivan, 1993); District 203: Naperville, Illinois - 68.9% (Kiser, 1993); Reedsport School District: Reedsport, Oregon - 61.4% (Rice, 1993); Forest Hills High School: Forest Hills, New York - 69% (Harrington, 1993). Although these figures are competitive with those posted by the Catholic schools, they were not as accessible. This information was acquired through calls made to the schools, not through publications available to the publics of these schools.

Retention.

The issue of retention deals mostly with the attention given to students and the programs and activities that schools provide to keep student's interest. While this is a large concern in society today, Catholic schools address this issue minimally. Catholic schools rely mostly on recruitment materials to convey this information.

In annual reports, data relating to this issue is scarce; the

reports that do address retention approach it indirectly. The schools seem to attempt to form the image of a place for any student to grow and learn - a "garden of Eden" that no one would want to leave. Marian Catholic and Mother McAuley both stress that their schools provide an atmosphere that allows students to develop and satisfy their individual needs and academic desires (1991; 1992). Marian High School also provides a similar image through the phrase: "a Christian environment with a variety of activities enabling each student to realize her full potential for intellectual, personal, civic and religious growth" (1992). St. Mary's sums up its relevant information in the phrase that the school is designed "particularly with the students needs in mind" (1991).

Recruitment materials that were evaluated also dealt with the issue of retention. Through an emphasis on attention to students as well as the existence of guidance departments and faculty advisors who help students through difficult times and decisions. Northridge Prep points out that each individual, in addition to teachers, has an advisor who meets regularly with the student to address progress and needs (1990). Mother McAuley takes a similar approach; it states that the school helps students to make the right choices in life, both academically and personally (1992). Gross High School, Seton, Marist, Providence, and Marian Catholic inform the public about guidance and counseling departments that serve several functions: personal counseling, student support groups for various problems, and assistance in class programming (1985; 1992; 1989; 1989; 1992) Every school also gives

information on all the organizations, programs, and activities available to students and promote the idea that these can assist in this development of a student's personal identity as well as build up a student's interest in learning as a whole.

The newsletters contain information similar to that in the recruitment materials, to address the many activities and programs available to students. "Marian Matters" includes an article on the goals of the school to provide more extra curricular activities for students to participate in (1992) and the "Bruin Prints" explains the excitement over the schools fine arts program. "The Flame", a newsletter published by the Veritas Foundation (ST. Thomas Aquinas H. S. - Hammond, LA) has an article entitled, "Fun Outside the Classroom" that gives information on the growth of its extra curricular activities and the enjoyment they provide for students.

Only one advertisement addressed this issue. The aforementioned "report card" quotes a graduation rate of ninety-six percent for the Catholic schools throughout the nation as compared to a sixty-six percent rate for the public schools (1993).

Civic Responsibility

Order.

The first aspect of the "civic responsibility" dimension, "order", is another important value that is addressed; particularly as it relates to student discipline. However, most information that deals with this issue is found in the recruitment materials, while in the annual reports, little attention is paid to the idea

of order.

Mother McAuley and St. Mary's annual reports both promote their culturally diverse atmospheres and the support that the schools foster (1992; 1992). These are environments that allow students of all races to interact and get along with each other. Marian High School's report claims that the school helps to "shape" the student into a mature individual (1992). Marian Catholic is the only one of these schools that actually states the word "discipline" in its report; it states that strong discipline "helps students to develop decision-making skills, to accept responsibility, and to prepare for life in a dynamic society" (1991).

The recruitment materials are full of information relevant to the issue of order. Northridge Prep includes a quotation from a parent in its recruitment brochure that states the importance of discipline and how Northridge effectively meets this need. The parent states that: "There is an intellectual challenge with motivation, discipline with sincere interest in the boy, the teaching of truth rather than opinion and fancy, and the wonderful example set by the faculty." (1990). Another quotation, this one from an alumni, states that Northridge gave him "a clear sense of right and wrong and of how to judge what goes on in the world"; it also relates that this helped greatly in his academic and social successes. The brochure also discusses the teachers as positive role-models who provide guidance for the students and the discipline code that encourages an "atmosphere of high standards and personal dignity" (1990). Gross also talks of their discipline

code in which friendship between students and faculty and students is an essential part. This school also gives information on its dress code and states that it teaches the importance of a strong personality. Gross even promotes its wide range of extra curricular activities as ways to keep students active and interested in school. These activities provide students "with opportunity for personal growth"; and "the degree of involvement of our students in their school proves to be our greatest strength (1985). Providence cites a strong emphasis on personal attention and individual growth (1989) and Marist addresses this issue by stating that it creates a participative atmosphere in which students "like" education (1989). Seton Academy also stresses its emphasis on cooperation among students; it states that its student body is "united" by a desire to learn and succeed. Seton also informs the public that it awards students for achievement (1992). Marian Catholic states that the school has a safe, comfortable, and caring atmosphere that creates the ideal learning environment; the discipline standards help students to respect authority (1992), Mother McAuley puts forth the idea that it has a family-like atmosphere; additionally, it teaches its students to be "genuine" in their beliefs and actions (1992).

Much like the issue of retention, the last two types of publications do not contain a great deal of information pertaining to "order". "Marian Matters" covers a meeting of the National Congress on Catholic Education; it asserts that the group wants the schools to continue to provide a safe environment for their tudents. "News About Catholic Schools", reported the results of

a national Gallup poll on education reveal that three of the top five areas in which people rated the Catholic schools as superior to their public counterparts were: 1) the level of discipline provided, 2) the creation of an environment with less chance of students becoming involved with drugs or alcohol, and 3) the overall safety of the student body (1992). "The Flame" briefly addressed this issue by supporting extra curricular activities because they keep the students busy and interactive (1992). One advertisement by the Archdiocese of Chicago, cites U.S. Department of Education statistics that show students in Catholic schools are 400% percent less likely to be offered drugs while on school grounds then students in public schools (1991).

Moral standards.

The final aspect of the legitimation model, moral standards, seems to be one of the most emphasized issues in the publications. For religious organizations, a common expectation is that such standards would be a part of the school's environment. However, the Catholic schools need to call attention to this aspect of their system due to the current crisis of moral values in public education. As with all the previous legitimacy dimensions, as one would expect, this one is covered mostly in the recruitment materials.

In its annual report, Marian Catholic High School promotes an atmosphere of morals that help in value formation (1992); while St. Mary's claims that it creates an environment for students to develop "spiritually, aesthetically, and socially" through an

emphasis on respect for life as a "service to others" (1991). Compassion, hospitality, prayer and Christian service are stated as the strengths of the school environment at Marian High School, as well as an emphasis on "unity through diversity" (1992). Mother McAuley also informs the public of its moral environment; one in which students learn to make important decisions with a well-developed moral conscience as well as learn the value of compassionate responses to those in need (1992).

The recruitment materials evaluated are rich in information that promote the existence of moral standards. Northridge Prep states that it is a school built on a sound moral foundation that helps students develop the ideals and values which must guide them for the rest of their lives (1990). Gross portrays itself as a "community" through the phrases "Christians growing together in faith" and "people finding the importance of reaching out in service" (1985). Providence states that the school promotes social growth with religious development (1989) and Marist mirrors the ideals of Northridge in its claim of a strong religious foundation that helps in day-to-day relationships with others (1989). Seton promotes the idea that its students are united by shared values that help students believe in themselves and each other (1992). Marian Catholic claims that the foundation of the school is built around a "moral pursuit" of truth that serves to "deepen the students' Christian convictions". Marian also states that it helps students to accept responsibility and promotes participation in religious activities such as retreats (1992). Mother McAuley also claims to have an environment built on Christian attitudes and

beliefs; it further states that the faculty emphasize spiritual growth and personal development (1992).

Announcements and advertisements provide no information that supports the issue of moral standards; however, a limited amount can be found in a couple of the newsletters. In "January News About Catholic Schools", the Archdiocese's newsletter, cites another statistic from the Gallup poll that shows that the second greatest factor that indicates the superiority of Catholic over private schools is the Catholic schools' development of moral and ethical behavior (1992). In "Marian Matters" articles talk of Marian's long range goals for increased religious and spiritual development. In a report from the National Congress on Catholic Schools, it states that the schools provide an environment that promotes strong cultural diversity in which students develop gospel values and Christian teachings (1992).

Catholic Schools: Legitimate Institutions?

The legitimation model proposed for this study focuses on the issues most important to society when dealing with effective educational institutions. The model is an indicator of these values and when Catholic schools are applied to this model, they effectively address the dimensions of performance, retention, order, and moral standards, especially in their recruitment materials. However, the audience that these materials reach, and therefore the audience that the schools seek legitimacy with, is very narrow in scope. Recruitment materials are distributed to prospective students and their parents, and most other

advertisements reach only this and similar audiences (i.e. parishioners of churches who might also have an elementary school or high school it runs). The Catholic schools may be perceived as being legitimate with this restricted audience, but if there is an interest by the Church in a broader audience, a more in depth and encompassing public relations campaign needs to be undertaken. This is an important decision for Catholic schools to make, especially as the chance for a voucher system of education becomes more of a reality.

Public relations and marketing materials provide an important link to society, one that is vital in the transmission of information to an organization's key audiences. They help an organization to relate its basic ideals to a reader, as well as how the organization provides a unique, yet superior environment to other available alternatives. Catholic schools have effectively used such materials to reach a narrow audience and during the present crisis in the education system, have emerged as legitimate institutions with this audience.

However, more attention needs to be given to the dimensions of retention and order, two particular strengths of Catholic schools. As the crisis persists, the importance of qualified and dedicated faculty in education is vital in effective education. Society will feel safer sending students to schools that have teachers who are pleased with their jobs and reflect this positive attitude to their students. The schools should provide more information on any aspect of their system that positively addresses these values and concerns.

This study also supports the idea that organizations need to be proactive within their environment. The Catholic schools have effectively addressed the values of importance in society, but as times change, these values may change as well. To keep themselves on the higher side of the legitimacy continuum, Catholic schools must be sure to identify any new values or attitudes that develop in society. If new values are identified, the schools need to address these in their public relations campaigns and supporting materials. Catholic schools must also address the issue of broadening their base audience in order to keep themselves on the higher end of the continuum. The narrow and somewhat captive audience that the Catholic schools currently focus on is not a true representation of American society and therefore does not legitimate the schools with all of its peoples.

CONCLUSION

The public educational system of the United States currently suffers a legitimation crisis. For almost 200 years, the nation's publics have taken the legitimacy of this institution for granted, always believing that it was a strong system and worth their confidence and support. However, today people have taken notice of the many problems that exist in our schools and now speak out for change.

As this crisis continues to grow, Catholic schools attempt to legitimate themselves and point out that they provide the solutions to these problems as well as identify with the needs and values important to society. These schools have discovered the importance

of public relations and use it to survive in today's competitive education environment. The rest of the schools in America's education system should follow suit and begin to develop effective public communication campaigns which effectively identify with the values important to society. Although competition is not the only answer, it will begin to force schools to reevaluate their purpose and hopefully move towards the practices that in the past have produced well educated students.

Although this study illustrates how the proposed legitimation model can be applied to educational institutions, it also provides several other practical applications of the model. This study points out the educational values important to society, but further illustrates the importance of organizations being proactive within their environments. In order to attempt to legitmate oneself, an organization must seek relevant information from its publics concerning the values important to persons within that society. These values are the key link to an effective public relations campaign, establishing common ground between the organizations and its publics. This study also provides several guidelines for such campaigns, providing examples of current efforts by Catholic schools and the contents of these campaigns. These examples also show shortcomings of the current efforts and where the strongest improvements need to take place.

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